

What to Do When Mercury Spills at School

If mercury spills, it can turn into poisonous vapors that can have dangerous health effects. Follow these simple steps to keep students and staff safe — and to prevent mercury from spreading throughout your school.

Clear out the room.

- Keep everyone away from the spill — especially children and pregnant women.
- Leave anything that has mercury on it (like clothes and shoes) in the spill area.
- Make sure everyone walks around the mercury when leaving the room. This will help prevent mercury from spreading around the school.



Close off the room.

- Close doors to other parts of the school.
- Turn off central air conditioning and heating systems.
- Close all air vents in the room if you can.

Air out the room.

- Open windows and doors to the outside.
- Use fans to blow mercury vapors outside. Turn off any fans that don't blow air outside.



Never use a vacuum or a broom in the spill area. This will break mercury into tiny drops that can go into the air more easily.

Clean up the spill or call a professional.

For large spills:

If more than the amount of mercury in a thermometer or a light bulb spilled, you will need professional cleanup help.

After you have evacuated the room:

- Call the environmental agency or the health department in your area right away. They can provide resources to help you screen and reopen the room.
- If more than 1 pound (about two tablespoons) of mercury has spilled you must call the National Response Center (NRC) at 1-800-424-8802. The line is answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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For small spills:

If the spill happened when a thermometer or a light bulb broke, you can probably clean it up yourself.



Keep in mind that any spill involving mercury can be serious. So even if you can clean it up yourself, it's very important that you follow the cleanup instructions carefully. If you would like a pdf of the step by step instructions to clean up a small spill click here - "Mercury Quick Facts. Cleaning up Mercury Spills in Your House" - or follow the steps below .

First, create a spill kit:

Collect the items you'll need to clean up the spill. If you already have a spill kit at your school, you can skip ahead to the cleanup steps.

To clean up a small spill you will need:

- Zipper-top plastic bags
- Trash bags (2 to 6 mm thick)
- Rubber or latex gloves
- Paper towels
- Cardboard
- Paper
- An eye dropper
- Duct tape and/or shaving cream and brush
- A flashlight
- Powdered sulfur (optional)

Then follow these steps to clean up a small spill using your spill kit:

Clean up the mercury drops.

When mercury spills, it breaks up into tiny drops, or beads, that can travel around very easily on the floor.

- Put on a pair of rubber or latex gloves.
- Put any pieces of broken glass on a paper towel. Fold the paper towel to prevent glass from spilling out, and put it in a zipper-top bag.
- Use the cardboard to roll the drops of mercury onto a piece of paper.
- You can also use an eye dropper to collect the drops. Squeeze the mercury out of the dropper and onto a damp paper towel.
- Put the paper towel, paper, eye dropper, and anything else that touched mercury in a zipper-top bag and zip it shut.

Clean up the small mercury drops that you can't see.

- Pat the area where the mercury spilled with duct tape. You may also put shaving cream on top of a small paint brush and gently blot the affected area to pick up small mercury drops. Put the tape into a zipper-top bag and zip it shut.
- Optional: If you have it, you can use powdered sulfur to clean up the drops of mercury that are too small to see. Sulfur makes drops of mercury easier to see because it causes them to change color. It also causes the mercury drops to join together, which makes them easier to clean up.



Be very careful if you decide to use powdered sulfur. Breathing it in can be harmful to your health.

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Look for mercury that you might have missed.

- Turn off the lights in the room where mercury spilled.
- Hold your flashlight at a low angle close to the floor and look for drops of mercury that you might have missed during the cleanup.
- Keep in mind that drops of mercury may stick to surfaces or hide in small cracks.



Mercury can move further than you think on hard, flat surfaces. Make sure you check the whole room very carefully with your flashlight.

Collect any items that have touched mercury.

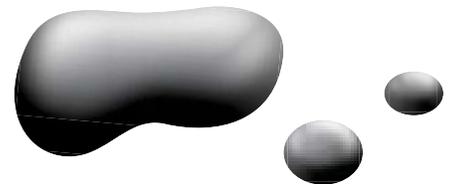
- If mercury spilled on a carpet, remove it from the floor. Put it in a trash bag and seal it shut. Put the trash bag in another trash bag and seal that one shut. Put the bag outside the school.
- Collect clothes, shoes, backpacks, books or other items that have touched mercury and put them into trash bags. If you or anyone else is still wearing clothes or shoes that might have mercury on them, take them off and put them in a bag. Seal the bag and put it in another bag. Seal the second bag shut. Put the bags outside the school until they can be screened for mercury.



If mercury touched your skin, stay still and have someone bring you some wet paper towels and a zipper-top bag or a trash bag. Wipe any drops of mercury off your skin and put the paper towels into the bag.

Get rid of materials used in cleanup safely.

- Put the bags that contain mercury and everything else you used during the cleanup in a trash bag. Seal it and put it in another bag. Seal the second trash bag shut and put it outside the school.
- Label the bag with a tag that says "Mercury."
- Contact your health department, environmental agency, or local collection program to find out how to get rid of the materials safely.



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After the spill cleanup:

- Keep air flowing in the area where the mercury spilled for at least 24 hours after the spill. Open windows and use fans to help air out the room.
- Continue to keep students out of the cleanup area.
- Consider hiring a professional to check the mercury levels in your school. You can contact your health department or your local environmental agency to help you find professionals who can screen your school for unsafe levels of mercury.

Know how to handle health concerns.

- Use the **Mercury Spill Talking Points** to answer specific questions. You can find them on the Don't Mess with Mercury website.
- Tell people to call a doctor if they are worried about their health after breathing mercury vapors.
- If someone gets sick, call the Poison Control Center at 1-888-222-1222 right away.

